

Report for “International English” Education Research Group, The Institute for Research in Humanities and Social Sciences, Aichi University, 2015-2016

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Introduction

The “International English” Education Research Group (“国際英語”教育研究会) of The Institute for Research in Humanities and Social Sciences, Aichi University (人文社会学研究所、愛知大学) began its work during the academic years of 2015-2016 studying the Contemporary International English (CIE) program in the Faculty of Letters. During the two-year period to date, three researchers investigated student attitudes towards learning and using English, teacher reflections on program development, and changing national policy on English language education. In addition, researchers attended international conferences focused on English as a lingua franca (ELF8, Beijing) and English language education in Asia (RELC2017, Singapore), broadening their understanding of current research related to this project. In this report, major MEXT policies are examined, the background of the CIE program is chronicled, and data gathered from students and teachers are analysed.

Research Aims

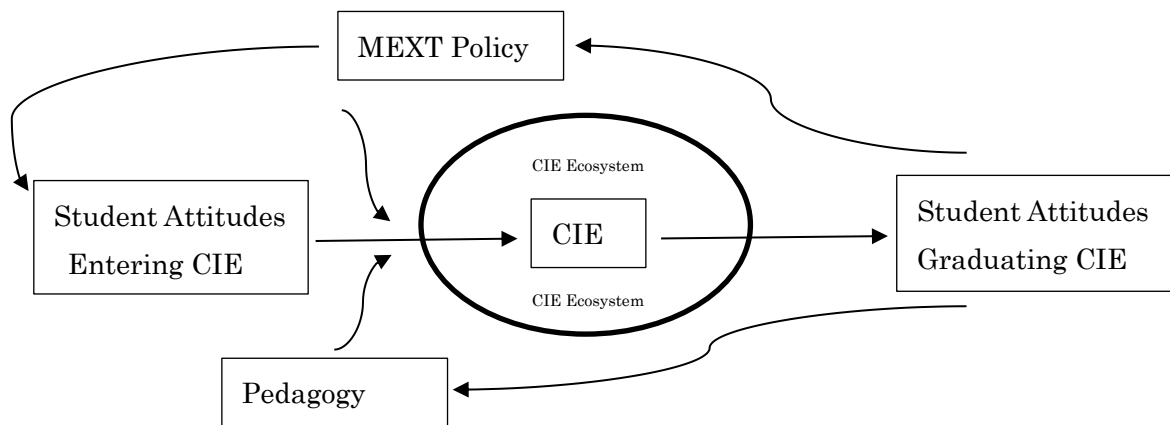
As institutions from elementary to higher education try to meet the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science & Technology’s (MEXT) 2020 education targets, we seek to provide an ongoing narrative of our ‘bottom-up’ experience in establishing CIE as a program at a higher education institution within a time of paradigm shifts in education policy. Our current aims are:

- i. Tracking student attitudes and experiences prior to entering and graduating the program in terms of English experience, global outlook, and motivations. The impetus for this is that Japanese youth have been branded with inward tendencies (*uchimuki*).
- ii. Tracking past, present, and future instructor approaches to CIE as the program evolves.
- iii. Surveying the CIE ecosystem.
- iv. Providing mentoring and career development opportunities for CIE instructors to develop transferable skills, keep abreast of program-related pedagogical

developments, address issues facing the program, and contribute to the overall program trajectory.

- v. Establish CIE's record and history of performance in line with MEXT to promote/defend program existence and funding.

Investigative Model



The Climate – Education in Japan

Perhaps nostalgic of post-Meiji Restoration and post-WWII nation building sentiments, the latest generation of policy makers are billing post-2011 reforms as a Japanese ‘rebirth’ (National Policy Unit, 2012) with a due date in 2020, the year of the Tokyo Olympics. Obvious parallels may be drawn to the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, then viewed as Japan’s post-WWII return to the international stage. The education reform policy rhetoric appears to be taking a holistic approach and addressing issues of curriculum and textbook content, outlining desired skills development for students, and investing in teacher career development.

In this context MEXT has placed the burden of change, if not blame for all Japan’s woes, on the youth, stating “Japanese young people are recently said to be ‘inward-oriented’” (MEXT, 2011a: 2). The subsequent focus of curriculum reforms on improving English abilities through a shift away from a “...lecture style toward student-centered language activities by employing such educational forms as speeches, presentations, debates and discussions” (MEXT, 2011:3) implied the current crop of students lacked these skills. The alleged inwardness of youth was picked up by the media and has been accepted by

many as the norm, as well as coming under critical scrutiny (British Council, 2014; Burgess 2015).

Though the aspirations of MEXT are commendable and achievable, their timeline is fixed and their practical actions and support lack the impact of their policy rhetoric. The challenge is to transform a top-down system to one composed of outward-looking, autonomous problem solvers who are able to pass on those same skills to the 'inward-oriented' youth and transform them into successful citizens capable of rebuilding Japan by 2020.

Essentially, MEXT is looking at how Japan can survive in the long term, and higher education institutions are acutely aware that MEXT funding is contingent on meeting its desired policy outcomes. Much of MEXT's rhetoric is backed with digital support and social media, but results can only be measured near the end of the education cycle. Our research in CIE will progress alongside a major curriculum shift in all levels of education. It has the potential to offer insight into both national policy and private university program development, primarily from a pedagogical perspective but with administrative insights as well.

Seniority-based administrative practices are arguably viewed by policy makers as the norm for education, despite the disconnect with frontline deliverers of policy which is often revealed. Japanese teachers of English are now being asked to upgrade their skills, and adopt methods of instruction in which they have not been adequately trained and for which they may lack resources. Materials development in Japan lags behind other countries in Asia, and tends to reflect teachers' established practices; while according to Higgins (2017), MEXT fails to provide adequate pedagogical buttressing for its policy. It is within this climate that we are attempting a bottom-up approach to program development, with the aim of evaluating its effect on the students and teachers in the program as well as within the wider campus. We also aim to assess how the goals and achievements of CIE align with MEXT's next generation policy, where it fits in the wider English language ecosystem in Japan, and what it might contribute to ELT pedagogy.

The Environment – Aichi University

Aichi University is a medium-sized private liberal arts university, founded in 1946 and located on three campuses in the cities of Nagoya and Toyohashi in central Japan. The

original campus in Toyohashi now accommodates the Faculty of Letters, within which exists the Contemporary International English program. This program was created in 2011, largely replacing the previous program of Literature of the English-speaking World. This in itself was a response to MEXT's emphasis on developing basic language skills and "a positive attitude toward communication through foreign languages" (2011b:1, 2011c:1).

Like other universities in the area and all over Japan, Aichi University is attempting to toe the global line to access competitive funding sources by adopting global branded advertising ("Imparting wisdom for globalized world"); pushing its global motto "Foster the human potential by recognizing global wisdom and common outlook"; and establishing its Global Lounge, a language communication space on its main Nagoya campus. Although an overtly international image is being projected, part of our research is to ascertain the extent and means by which the actual practicalities of internationalisation might be achieved, given the overall educational climate in Japan and the actual environmental conditions existing in Aichi University.

The Ecosystem – Contemporary International English program

The focus then is on how the CIE ecosystem may develop, and the influence it may have on institutional and pedagogical change. In order to sustain the program, it is essential to map and monitor its ecology in light of what maintenance may be necessary and what its future direction should be. Needs analysis covering both institutions and individuals; pedagogical underpinning and faculty involvement; and administrative attitudes to the aims and outcomes of the program are all key.

A number of environmental factors contributed to what has been a bottom-up, or organic, development in the CIE program. An important one was the limited size of the program, based on a local campus, which led to 'benign neglect' on the part of the administration, and made it easier for CIE teachers to collaborate on an informal basis of consensus. It was also important that there has been relative equality of input between Japanese and non-Japanese teachers in the program, despite their being on different contracts. One reason for this is mutual respect based on the recognition that all teachers in CIE share intercultural and multilingual sensitivities.

From the outset the CIE program aimed at having all its classes taught basically in English, and a majority of its teachers being multilingual. Individual courses focus on contemporary media, current affairs and intercultural awareness, as well as on

practical language skills. Although, as Bowles (2015, 194) reminds us, “[i]nterest in the relationship between teaching and ELF is a relatively recent phenomenon”, the CIE instructors are adapting CLIL- and ELF-oriented pedagogies in their classes. While students are encouraged to spend time studying abroad, and a one-semester program for third-year students at a Canadian university was identified as being particularly suitable, there is no emphasis on the value of studying an Inner Circle English (Kachru, 1992) rather than any other variety.

The first cohort of CIE students in 2012 numbered 17, and there were four teachers assigned to the program. In 2015 eighteen students graduated from CIE, of whom twelve had spent some time studying abroad. In 2017 (the latest available data) 27 students will graduate of whom sixteen have studied abroad. Originally there were two specialist seminars available to students in the major: English Communication Studies and Contemporary International English. From April 2017 third-year students have the opportunity to join a seminar in Cultural Studies of the English-speaking World.

The English Communication Studies seminar is primarily concerned with sociolinguistic aspects of English and Japanese discourse, such as different communication styles, non-verbal communication and various modes of mediated communication. The Contemporary International English seminar focuses on the functions and forms of English used in global communication, especially in relation to Japan, and including the development of local Englishes and questions of individual and community identity. It was particularly because of this that an emphasis on World Englishes and then English as a Lingua Franca developed.

With the addition of a fifth teacher, the major will continue to expand in size, but its focus will remain on encouraging student awareness of the variety of English in different regions, media and individual usage. To achieve this, students will be introduced to multiple perspectives on language use and cultural behavior, designed to raise critical thinking skills and dispel stereotypes. A key objective is to establish the students’ sense of ownership of their use of their second languages, and so increase their confidence in contexts of international communication.

The Students – Data and Discussion

Data was obtained from questionnaires and interviews to obtain feedback from CIE

students about their opinions concerning English and their perceptions of the program. The first survey to be carried out was on the initial group of CIE students when they graduated in March 2015. Later in the same year we asked Faculty of Letters students taking a first-year introductory course (*Nyumon Enshu*) about their language background and international experience. By studying the introductory course they were demonstrating their interest in foreign languages. A second questionnaire inquired about their attitudes to studying and using English. The following year about one-third of those students chose to join CIE, enabling us to compare responses they had made with those of students who went to alternative programs.

As well as conducting such synchronic analysis, we intend to use the same data to conduct diachronic analysis. We are particularly interested in how student attitudes change over the three years in which they are studying in CIE, and whether it is possible to identify particular factors related to such changes. To this end all students complete a questionnaire when they enter CIE at the beginning of their second year, and they will receive a second questionnaire when they graduate. A selection of students will also be interviewed to provide a more nuanced and individual appreciation of CIE and the learning environment.

The first questionnaire (Q.B.2015) provided various sets of data. Initially there were responses from first-year students (82) as well as from students already studying in CIE (78). The following April the former set could be divided into students who joined CIE (26) and those who joined other majors (56). The second questionnaire (Q.A.2015) was given only to first-year students, 24 of whom went on to study in CIE and 30 of whom did not. Both questionnaires were written in English, although students were invited to comment in either English or Japanese. The purpose of the questionnaire was clearly explained, and although students were requested to supply their names, they were not required to do so.

Foreign Language Background Questionnaire

The first questionnaire asked about the students' early experiences of English; periods spent abroad and their contact with people who have international experience; and their use of English or another foreign language outside the classroom. Results may be found in Appendix A. In summary, there were no surprising findings. The responses from those students already studying CIE were broadly similar to those who joined CIE in that year (2016), while both sets were noticeably different in certain areas from the

answers of students who did not join CIE (non-CIE).

For example, while around 55% of CIE students claimed to have used a foreign language outside of school or university, only about 27% of non-CIE students did. Moreover, a majority of CIE students seem to have been in situations where they initiated the use of a language other than Japanese, but around half of non-CIE students claimed that they spoke only after being spoken to in a foreign language. Another clear difference could be seen when the students were asked about their non-Japanese friends in Japan: more than 35% of CIE students said they have non-Japanese friends, compared to only 18% of non-CIE students. Perhaps the most significant comparison, however, is found in their early exposure to English. Most children in Japan will have experienced English in some form by the time they go to junior high school, but 58% of students who selected CIE said that they had 'met' English before the age of ten, compared with only 34% of other students.

Foreign Language Attitude Questionnaire

The second questionnaire focused on the attitudes of the first-year students towards studying English, and how that may be related to their identity and 'international posture' (Yashima, 2009). Results may be found in Appendix B. Again, there were no surprising findings, either in the overall attitudes or in the comparison between the students who later joined CIE and those who did not. In two questions exploring motivation, few students disagreed that English would be useful to them when searching for a job (Q7), or that they felt closer to native speaker culture when studying English (Q6). In fact, all of the students who joined CIE agreed with that extrinsic motivating factor, and only two of them didn't feel that a closeness to native speaker culture was a part of their motivation. Although non-CIE students showed almost the same motivation for English, it was more strongly inclined to be extrinsic and related to finding work.

Two other activities with which no students strongly disagreed were helping foreigners (Q1) and explaining to them about Japan (Q4). The former was marginally more popular with non-CIE, while the latter was substantially less so. Besides Q4, the largest difference in response between the two groups came when they were asked about their interest in events overseas (Q5). While only three of the students who joined CIE declared that they were not very interested in foreign affairs, eight (27%) of the other group were not. A difference was also clear in the question about language and

identity (Q10), where none of the students who joined CIE felt that their identity was strongly connected to their mother tongue. Around 30% felt that Japanese was important for them to express their true identity, while around 40% of the non-CIE students thought so.

Student Interviews

In addition to these questionnaires administered in class, semi-structured informal interviews were conducted from December 2015 to January 2016 with eight students who majored in the CIE program. In Tables A, the students' names (pseudonyms), gender, grade, and language used are displayed. Students were given the choice of using English or Japanese, and codeswitching when deemed necessary. The researcher in charge relied on the other researchers to recruit willing students for the interviews, which were conducted primarily in her office. On most occasions, the interviews were conducted individually but occasionally, informal group interviews evolved when students arrived early for their appointments or when interviews ran longer than expected. Students' informed consent was obtained orally after they heard explanations about how their privacy would be protected. The questions asked were broad in meaning, with the intention of allowing students to choose what was most salient. The initial question was phrased as follows: "What experiences in the CIE program are important for your learning and using English?" This often elicited narratives of their language learning histories (Peirce, 1995), which contextualized their comments about their learning in the CIE program.

Table A

Interviews Conducted in Academic Year 2015

<u>Date</u>	<u>Student name</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Language used</u>
12/14/2015	Kohei	3rd	M	English
12/21/2015	Takae	3rd	F	Japanese
12/22/2015	Yoshihiro	3rd	M	English/Japanese
1/15/2016	Eiko	2nd	F	English
1/18/2016	Sayaka	2nd	F	Japanese
1/28/2016	Shiho, Kazu, Masami	4th	F, M, F	Japanese

The interviews revealed a diversity of student views about their learning in the CIE program. Two students who were in their second year of study have been chosen for contrast. Eiko and Sayaka were very different in their prior experiences with and

thinking about English. For example, Eiko had interacted with an exchange student during her high school days, prompting her to study English with more effort because she realized that the language could be used for actual communication. She held strong beliefs that there were many opportunities to learn and use English while living in Japan, pointing out her use of popular movie DVDs for self-study and the chances to speak with customers in English at her part-time job. In addition, she mentioned assisting foreign tourists when asked for directions in Tokyo or Kyoto. Unlike most of the other students, she did not have any overseas experience and was uncertain about any such future plans.

Sayaka, on the other hand, had been abroad as a high school student for a short homestay and was signed up to attend the university semester abroad program. Most of her talk about using and studying English focused on being physically present in North American places. Concerning her studies in the CIE program, she talked of the importance that social activities played in her feeling comfortable with other students and the teachers. She recognized an improvement in her listening and speaking skills, but was not satisfied with her progress and looked at the overseas study as a chance to greatly improve, which she deemed necessary to achieve her dream job using English in the travel industry. These two students contrasted in how they viewed learning and using English while in Japan, with Eiko highlighting her efforts at self-study and taking advantages of chance opportunities to communicate in Japan, and Sayaka focusing on going abroad to improve her speaking skills.

A group interview with three 4th year students from the second CIE cohort graduating (Table A) revealed another aspect of how the students differed in their outlooks about what they gained from the CIE program. Shiho spoke of seeing English as a way to go beyond the confines of her narrow world, defined by geography and strong local social networks. Not being a confident language student, she found she had to get over 'barriers' to be able to use English in the highly interactive CIE classes. She spoke of being able to 'widen' her world by experiences in the overseas semester program. Not having had contact with non-Japanese before entering university, learning about other ways of doing things like actively sharing opinions in class or practicing religion helped her make a move into the 'broader' world. On the other hand, Kazu depicted his relationship with English as 'accidental', beginning with being placed in a specialized English program in high school and winding up in CIE, his second choice. Since he had been accustomed to using English in high school classes, he felt comfortable with the

group work-oriented classroom style and he found the small-sized classes good for making friends. Finding the overseas study experience ‘humbling’ when he realized he could not order fast food well, he nonetheless chose to work in the travel industry. Masami emphasized her long-term interest in English from junior high school days and being encouraged by supportive teachers. Being immersed in English classes fulfilled her desire for intensive study and she pictured herself as someone who could potentially assist customers in English. She also mentioned the importance of learning about the varieties of English and ELF, stating that the knowledge led to a ‘new perspective’ of what English is.

The above examples cover only a limited number of interviewees and do not represent the whole of their experiences and evaluations of the CIE program. Some of those not included here made no mention of learning about the existence of English varieties nor any changes in their attitudes about themselves as English learners and users. Others emphasized how they had been changed by experiencing English as a tool for communication with classmates and teachers and other interlocutors such as customers and foreign tourists. In addition, overseas study was repeatedly mentioned as being a valuable opportunity to reassess their language abilities.

Teacher Interviews

The two teachers who were interviewed individually during the 2015 Academic Year had been involved with the CIE program from its inception. Steve and Craig (both pseudonyms) were both long-term residents in Japan, originally from Inner Circle countries, and were familiar with the English language teaching field in Japan, having taught in the secondary, tertiary and commercial sectors. They spoke about their intensive participation in the development of the CIE program and aspects that required further institutional support.

Steve spoke of the importance of students’ developing communication strategies and how he used both classroom interaction and online chat formats to help students become aware of the gaps in their abilities to maintain a conversation. He also emphasized the role that social events played in helping the students to ‘bond’ which he felt was crucial for a program focused on intense classroom interaction. Commenting on witnessing students becoming able to actively participate in classroom discussions after spending a semester abroad, he recommended that such overseas study be a requirement for the CIE program.

Craig shared similar views with Steve about the importance of creating a congenial atmosphere within the program and the value of overseas study but added that opportunities for short, intensive internship-like experiences using English in Japan that he had arranged were available and needed to be institutionalized in the program. He felt that students gained confidence as English users from those internships and became visibly more active in the classroom. In addition to language skills, Craig thought becoming more open-minded and developing intercultural skills were important for students. He voiced concerns about program continuity considering the current status of teaching staff hired on limited term contracts.

Conclusion

Since the interview and questionnaire data are still at an early stage of collection, it is safer to point out certain areas that appear to warrant further research than to draw hasty conclusions. Interviews with students and teachers provided valuable insights on how the program contents were understood and experienced. In particular, interviewing the same students over a period of time has promise for gaining a better understanding of how students evolve throughout the CIE program. Tracking certain students after graduation for further follow-up interviews is a possibility to be explored. In addition, not all teachers have been interviewed at this stage and it will be worthwhile to gather data from all those teaching in the program in the coming years.

As for the questionnaire data, it is possible to tentatively identify three areas in which there were differences between students who joined CIE and students who chose not to join CIE. The first is their early exposure to English; the second their acquaintance with non-Japanese; and the third their use of English outside an academic environment. These may all be related to their home and family environment, an area outside the remit of our research. It would also be interesting to investigate any correlation between these factors and answers to Q10 about language and the student's sense of identity. The greater acquaintance of CIE students with non-Japanese correlates with the results of Q4 and Q6, both of which demonstrate a higher level of willingness to communicate with foreigners. Both results would also raise expectations of CIE students using English more outside of the classroom.

One area which did not produce a clear difference, but which is worth exploring further, is the issue of motivation. It appears that students joining CIE may have marginally

higher motivation to study English in general as well as a tendency to stronger intrinsic motivation (Q6). It would be interesting to analyse this in more detail, and to include questions in future questionnaires that might track changes in the focus of student motivation during their time in CIE. With a greater understanding of where our students are coming from – in terms of background experience and attitudes – and what they feel are suitable and achievable goals, we hope to contribute to the more effective teaching of foreign languages within the university as a whole and to produce results in line with MEXT's desired outcomes.

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Appendix A

Q.B.2015 Language Background – Nyumon Enshu & CIE 2015

		Students who entered CIE n=26	Students who did not enter CIE n=56	Students already studying CIE n=78
1. How old were you when you first experienced English? Where did you first experience English?	Under 10	58%	34%	45%
	At home	16%	11%	16%
2. Have you ever stayed abroad for more than two weeks?	Yes	20%	7%	26%
3. Are there any members of your family or close friends who have lived abroad? Of which are family members?	Yes	24%	32%	32%
		50%	39%	50%
4. Have you ever had a non-Japanese friend in Japan?	Yes	40%	18%	35%
5. Do you ever use English or another foreign language outside school or university?	Yes	58%	27%	53%

Appendix B

Q.A.2015 Attitudes to English – Nyumon Enshu Dec 2015

Students who entered CIE n=24 (Students who did not enter CIE n=30)	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	CIE	Non CIE	CIE	Non CIE	CIE	Non CIE	CIE	Non CIE
1. I'm interested in volunteer activities to help foreigners living in Japan.	6	(8)	15	(20)	3	(2)	0	(0)
2. I feel better studying in a class where all the students are Japanese.	3	(3)	7	(9)	13	(17)	1	(1)
3. In the future I hope to continue living near my family and hometown.	3	(5)	8	(11)	7	(10)	6	(4)
4. If I had a chance I would like to explain about Japanese life to foreigners.	6	(9)	15	(13)	3	(8)	0	(0)
5. Japan is an island and I don't have much interest in what happens overseas.	1	(4)	2	(4)	12	(12)	9	(10)
6. I want to study English because it makes me feel closer to native speakers' culture.	16	(14)	6	(12)	2	(4)	0	(0)
7. I think English will be useful or me when I graduate and have to find a job.	15	(20)	9	(8)	0	(2)	0	(0)
8. I have to study English now but I probably won't use it much after I graduate.	1	(3)	4	(6)	10	(17)	9	(4)
9. I feel more like studying English when my teacher is Japanese.	3	(1)	5	(10)	14	(16)	2	(3)
10. As I am Japanese I can only show my true identity when I speak Japanese.	0	(2)	7	(10)	16	(17)	1	(1)